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A BRIEF SURVEY OF TRUMP'S ASSAULT ON SCIENCE

In a new report, the Union of Concerned Scientists strives to document and detail all of the Trump administration's anti-science actions.

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In a recent *Washington Post* op-ed, a scientist and federal civil servant named Joel Clement blew the whistle on a White House that he says "chooses silence over science."

Until recently, Clement was the director of the Department of the Interior's Office of Policy Analysis, a top-level position where his duties included helping native Alaskan communities prepare for the effects of climate change. He was a bureaucratic advocate of sorts, using his scientific knowledge and policy expertise to press the Trump administration and the United Nations, among other parties, to protect Alaska's coastal villages from melting permafrost, rising seas, and dangerous storm surges. He was laboring to prevent native peoples from becoming internally displaced refugees. His work, however, was brought to a sudden halt on June 15th, when departmental brass demoted and involuntarily reassigned him to a job in an "accounting office that collects royalty checks from fossil fuel companies."

Clement believes that his reassignment was retaliation. "It is clear to me that the administration was so uncomfortable with this work, and my disclosures, that I was reassigned with the intent to coerce me into leaving the federal government," he writes. He goes on to call the move "an abuse of power."

Clement's story is about the Trump administration's attempt to purge and silence a scientific expert. It's sad, it's unfair, but it isn't unique. In fact, it is just one more entry in the president's record of anti-science actions and activities during his first six months in office.

In a new report, "Sideline Science From Day One," released on July 20th, the Union of Concerned Scientists attempts to document this "war on science" in detail. The report contains, among other things, a timeline of all the actions the administration has undertaken since inauguration day to ignore or intimidate scientists and undermine their important work.

"By our measure," says Gretchen Goldman, a UCS research director with a Ph.D. in environmental engineering and one of the report's co-authors, "the administration has averaged one major attack on science every four days." These attacks break down into at least three different categories:

1. THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION HAS DISREGARDED SCIENTIFIC INPUT

The president and his cabinet, the UCS report makes plain, are methodically diminishing the influence of independent science in the federal government. In April, for instance, the Department of Justice dissolved its National Commission on Forensic Science, a panel of experts and lawyers who were charged with improving federal forensic science standards. In May, the Environmental Protection Agency effectively fired nine members of its Board of Scientific Counselors, an independent body that helps shape agency policy. That same month, meanwhile, the Department of the Interior halted the work of dozens of committees that advise it on scientific matters.

Perhaps the most egregious case, though, occurred in March, when EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt decided not to ban the pesticide chlorpyrifos, even though there is solid scientific evidence that the chemical has detrimental effects on the brain development of children. In announcing the decision, Pruitt simply ignored the findings of government and independent scientists. The continued use of chlorpyrifos, he argued, would "provide regulatory certainty" to the agriculture industry.

2. THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION HAS REVOKED OR DELAYED SCIENCE-BASED HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTIONS

Everyone knows about the president's withdrawal from the Paris climate accord, an abdication of federal responsibility practically unparalleled in recent memory. But when it comes to rolling back sensible science-based environmental protections, Paris was just the standout achievement in an expansive and ambitious slate. Indeed, in his first six months, Trump has put his signature to no fewer than 13 resolutions aimed at unraveling science-based air, drinking water, and workplace protections, according to the UCS.

With Congress' cooperation, for instance, Trump overturned the Department of the Interior's Stream Protection Rule, a complex regulation that required mountain-top-removal mining companies to monitor and collect data on how they affect nearby streams, among other provisions. In another case, in April, Trump and Pruitt's EPA decided to freeze and review a regulation that would have helped limit the quantity of toxic heavy metals that power plants are allowed to dump into waterways. A few months later, in June, the EPA delayed for a year an Obama-era rule that regulates ground-level ozone, a chemical that causes asthma in children. The Department of Labor, likewise, has delayed a regulation that seeks to limit worker exposure to silica, a dust that can cause the deadly lung disease silicosis. The list goes on and on.

3. THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION HAS SOUGHT TO BLOCK PUBLIC ACCESS TO SCIENTIFIC DATA

Another gem out of the *Washington Post* last week: "Interior Dept. Ordered Glacier Park Chief, Other Climate Expert Pulled From Zuckerberg Tour." That was the headline of an article describing how a bunch of bosses at the Department of the Interior headquarters in Washington, D.C., took time out of their busy schedules to call up the superintendent at Glacier National Park and forbid him and other climate experts from participating in Mark Zuckerberg's recent tour there. The technology mogul and Facebook founder was at the park to view the melting glaciers that have made it a symbol of climate change. The park superintendent and scientists, had they been allowed to attend, would surely have further informed Zuckerberg about the glaciers' troubling disappearance, but they were forced to stay behind.

This sort of scientific silencing seems to be a favorite Trump tactic. In January, the administration issued temporary gag orders on federal employees at the EPA and the Department of Agriculture, among other agencies. In February, the White House removed a slew of information, including visitor logs, from its open data portal. The administration has also altered scientific information on EPA, Department of State, and Department of Energy sites. As the UCS reports, "climate action reports are gone from the State Department's website, and climate change information has been altered on the EPA and [Department of Energy] websites."

The Trump administration would also like to eviscerate the ability of government scientists to do their work. Its May budget proposal would reduce the EPA's funding by 31 percent, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's funding by 17 percent, the National Science Foundation's funding by 11 percent, and the Department of the Interior's funding by nearly 12 percent. These agencies all conduct critical work in health, environmental, and wildlife science, among other fields, and would be devastated by such bone-deep budget cuts.

"This report is really alarming," says Tom Burke, a high-level official in President Barack Obama's EPA and a professor at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "The way the report presents the data, from day one, from Paris to chlorpyrifos, on budget issues, on personnel issues, it really is a very vivid portrayal of an assault on science."

"This," he adds, "is a wake up call to the scientific community."